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AUTHOR Gomez, Rafael
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ABSTRACT

This paper examines ways that Hispanic culture can be dealt with in Spanish as a foreign language for business. First, rationales for teaching culture are offered, ranging from the abstract observation that knowledge of culture is a required part of a humanistic education, to the more pragmatic need of businesses for representatives who are fluent in language and have an intimate knowledge of culture. Next, the difficulty of defining "culture" and teaching such a broad subject is discussed. Course objectives are then delineated, including enhancement of students' awareness of themselves as cultural beings, explanation of the fluidity and ambiguity of cultural descriptions, and descriptions of the diverse elements that make up a culture and of how cultures are interdependent. (JL)

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Is There Room for Octavio Paz in the Spanish for Business Class?

Rafael Gomez
Monterey Institute of International Studies

ED349805

Of course, the differences between Mexico and the United States are not imaginary projections but objective realities. Some are quantitative, and can be explained by the social, economic, and historical development of the two countries. The more permanent ones, though also the result of history, are not easily definable or measurable. I have pointed out that they belong to the realm of civilization, that fluid zone of imprecise contours in which are fused and confused ideas and beliefs, institutions and technologies, styles and morals, fashion and churches, the material culture and the evasive reality which we rather inacurately call le génie des peuples.

Octavio Paz

Table 7-1. *Latin American Culture and Affected Business Functions.*

Aspects of Latin American Culture	*Examples of Business Functios Affected*
Life follows a preordained course, and human action is determined by the will of God.	*Planning, scheduling*

Fernando Quezada and James E. Boyce

One does not need to look to closely at these two quotes to notice that the subject of culture in a Spanish for Business class can be dealt with in a variety of ways. The aim of this paper is to raise some questions and to present

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some possible solutions to the issue of how to deal with culture in foreign language Business classes. I will begin with a rationale for teaching culture followed by some of the difficulties involved in planning, the course objectives, and end with some sample lesson activities.

Rationale for teaching culture in a business class

The reasons why a student in a business class should study culture can range from the more general to the very specific. At the most abstract level the teaching of culture and civilization is part of a humanistic education and is an important component in the development of a well-educated person. In the words of Wilga Rivers, it grants an individual the opportunity to liberate himself or herself from the constraints of one view of the world.

This liberation is essential in today's world. "An understanding of the way of life of a foreign people," writes Ned Sealy,

> is important to survival in a world of conflicting value systems, where the boundaries that formerly isolated and protected people from alien ideas have been eroded by the angry clamor of the down-trodden in their search for a better life. How is one to liberate one's ideas from the stagnant recesses of ethnocentrism, from what Francis Bacon called the 'fallacy of the tribe,' if not through a study of other cultures?(Omaggio 359).

In an era of instant communication and economic interdependence the need to be able to understand, communicate and do business effectively with others seems rather obvious. Nevertheless, in the United States the study of languages and cultures is considered by many as something inconsequential or superfluous. This sentiment seems to be

rooted in the XIX century concept of "Americanization" which according to some scholars "represents an extreme ethnocentric world view in which our society is viewed as superior to all others, and foreign nationals are regarded as 'underdeveloped' Americans" (Omaggio 357). The XXI century demands a rejection of such philosophy and requires us to learn to communicate and understand others, if we are to be successful. It is, therefore, in the best interest of the United States to train individuals who are able to understand, communicate and be sensitive to the needs and demands of others who are culturally and linguistically different.

One does not need to go out of the borders of the country to find others who are different. The Other, as Carlos Fuentes reminds us, is part of the culture of the United States. "Los Angeles," writes the Mexican intellectual, "is now the second-largest Spanish-speaking city in the world, after Mexico City, before Madrid and Barcelona. You can prosper in southern Florida even if you speak only Spanish, as the population is predominantly Cuban. San Antonio, integrated by Mexicans, has been a bilingual city for 150 years. By the middle of the coming century, almost half of the population of the United States will be Spanish-speaking" (408). To this can be added the fact that there are more than 300,000 Hispanic owned businesses than generate more than $20 billion a year (409).

That volume of activity, coupled with the strong push toward internationalization in business, provides the most apparent reason for teaching culture in a business class: there is a market for it. Business schools, for example, have begun to broaden their vision. In an article in Fortune magazine Jeremy Main identifies six new priorities for future MBAs and the first one is to give students a global perspective. "For starters," writes May, "require knowledge

of a foreign language and culture" (78). Lance Ayrault, general manager of Simpson Latin America.LTD, a Seattle based investment and forestry company, is typical of many students at the Monterey Institute's Teaching for Service Abroad Program. He points out that there is an increasing need in American companies for employees that are fluent both in language and culture with the emphasis on an intimate knowledge of the culture. In addition, a number of researchers in the last few years have been able to assess the needs of the business community and have created a list of priorities to be considered in the teaching of any business language course (Peter A. Eddy, Marianne Inman, Peggy Schoonover, Christine Uber Grosse and Ronald Cere). Among the skills needed they have included culture, understood here as attitudes, values and customs in other words "small c." Furthermore, they identified the need of students to be familiar with commercial practices and to be aware of and sensitive to cultural differences. The business world has realized that a competent person needs such training.

Whether the aim is to get a highly educated well-rounded individual or to provide an employee with the necessary skills to perform successfully in the global market, there seems to be little doubt of the need to include culture in any language class and in particular in a business language one. That is not to say that this would be an easy task.

Outline of difficulties and possible solutions

The first difficulty arises in term of what is understood by culture. Is it the literature, the art, the music, the philosophy and the unique insights of the privileged few in a society or is it something else? This represents a crucial question. The first reaction, based on a Liberal Arts training, is to say: culture is the best that a

group of people has contributed to mankind, and then to doubt whether or not that is a) true and b) feasible in the context of designing objectives for a business class. H. H. Stern, for example, pointed out that the lack of a working definition represents the main hindrance in developing a cultural curriculum. "The area of what constitutes culture," he writes, "is poorly defined, and courses offered in universities on culture or civilization generally lack a foundation in theory and research. As long as there is such a lack of adequate research it is very difficult to develop a cultural syllabus of quality" (Omaggio 362).

Nevertheless, attempts have been made to characterize culture. Wilga Rivers, for example, defines it as "all aspects of shared life in a community. Children growing up in a social group learn ways of doing things, ways of expressing themselves, ways of looking at things, what things they should value and what things they should despise or avoid, what is expected of them and what they may expect of others" (316). After an analysis of the subject, Alice Omaggio writes that culture embraces all aspects of human life, it includes all things that people learn to do. It comprises "the patterns of everyday life, the "do's" and "don'ts" of personal behavior, and all the points of interaction between the individual and the society" (363). Finally, the most appropriate definition is the one given by Octavio Paz. By choosing Paz, we include a definition that emanated from the culture that is the target of the class. The Nobel laureate explains:

> It is each society's vision of the world and also its feeling about time; there are nations that are hurrying toward the future, and others whose eyes are fixed on the past. Civilization is a society's style, its way of living and dying. It embraces the erotic and the culinary arts; dancing and burial; courtesy and curses;

> work and leisure; rituals and festivals; punishments and rewards; dealings with the dead and with the ghosts who people our dreams; attitudes toward women and children, old people and strangers,enemies and allies; eternity and the present; the here and now and the beyond. A civilization is not only a system of values but a world of forms and codes of behavior, rules and exceptions. It is society's visible side--institutions, monuments, work, things--but it is especially its submerged, invisible side: beliefs, desires, fears, repressions, dreams (56).

Such a definition, while esthetically satisfying, is nevertheless broad and all encompassing. It generates a sense of insecurity about anyone's knowledge of the subject. Also, it seems vague and unquantifiable and even somewhat threatening. The task now is to apply that definition to the specific context in which it will be used. In other words, what are the immediate needs of the students, what can be taught in a 15 week semester and how can it be done?

As an illustration of an answer to the first question I am going to use the class that I taught last Fall. There were eleven students in the class ranging from a superior language level (native speaker with few years of university study in El Salvador) to an intermediate high. They came from the departments of International Business, International Policy Study, International Management or Translation and Interpretation. Their goal was to complete a language requirement and to improve their language skills in order to be more competitive in their respective professional careers.

Since all of them had taken a minimum of four semesters of Spanish and all of them had spent at least a summer in a Spanish speaking country, they were at an advanced level of

cultural competency as defined by ACTFL Provisional Proficiency Guidelines.

Course Objectives:

At the most abstract general level, by the end of the second semester sequence the student should be able to evaluate the worth, reliability, or importance of different types of information about Hispanic culture. To achieve that overall goal, the student should follow the following steps: first, to demonstrate an awareness of himself or herself as a cultural being. This includes an understanding of what stereotypes are and how they are used and an ability to analyze stereotypes for the prejudice they reflect. Second, to explain the fluidity and ambiguity of cultural descriptions. Third, to describe the diversity of elements that make up a culture. Fourth, to describe how cultures are dependent on each other.[1]

Now, I will provide some descriptions of class activities that can help instructors implement those goals. Two types of exercises can help the student become aware of the important role that culture plays in our understanding of everyday reality. The first exercise involves the reading of Horace Miner's "Body Ritual Among the Nacirema." In this article, Prof. Miner describes a "still very poorly understood" culture of North America, a culture filled with exotic rituals and magic. The careful reader would notice early on that Nacirema is American spelled backwards and that the rituals of this alien culture are those of everyday Americans. The purpose of the article is to make the reader aware of the distortions we create ourselves when we describe

[1] The conceptual framework comes from Prof. Timothy Weiss's "A Conceptual Framework for Intercultural /International Communication" presented at the Eleventh Annual Conference on Language and Communication for World Business and the Professions held at Eastern Michigan University in the Spring of 1992

other people. The daily routine of brushing our teeth becomes:

> The daily body ritual performed by everyone includes a mouth-rite....this rite involves a practice which strikes the uninitiated stranger as revolting. It was reported to me that the ritual consists of inserting a small bundle of hog hairs into the mouth, along with certain magical powders, and then moving the bundle in a highly formalized series of gestures (504).

A second reading that serves as a complement to Miner's article is William B. Gudykunst and Young Yun Kim's "Cultural Variations and Message Decoding." In it the authors explain how thinking and perception are controlled by culture. The objective is to make students aware that culture is like a filter and that what we think and perceive is influenced by it.

Another exercise that can be used is to select a segment from a film that depicts cultural contrasts and to ask students to analyze why to an outsider certain American customs may seem strange. The Spanish film Skyline lends itself to this type of exercise. There are many scenes in which the main character encounters and discusses the cultural differences between Spain and the United States.

Also important in our aim to make the student aware of himself/herself as a cultural being is the role that prejudice plays in everyday life. One exercise that can be used is the following: give students a photocopy of a telephone directory that includes the names of dentists. The list must include a large percentage of Hispanic surnames. Then, the students are told that they are on vacation in a small town in California and that they have a terrible toothache and no way to get back home. Then, they are to choose a dentist and once they have committed themselves to a

dentist, ask them to write an explanation for their choice. Tell them to put it away and then ask them to read Brislen's description of the different forms that prejudice takes (a summary of the categories appears at the end of the paper). Ask them, then, to look at their previous explanations and to think whether their choice of a dentist reflects in anyway a stereotypical view of Hispanics.

Knowing about these different forms of prejudice provides the student with a vocabulary to use in the process of becoming aware of himself/herself as a cultural being.

The second goal that we set ourselves, was to show how the cultural behavior is not fixed and static but rather fluid and ever changing. For this illustration, I am going to use an anecdote from the testimonial novel ¡Aquí también, Domitila! by the Bolivian Domitila Barrios Chungara (Labarca 73-74). The topic to be discussed is machismo.

Pre-reading activity

1. Make a list of adjectives that can be used to describe the concept of machismo.
2. Share that list with your neighbor and come up with a description of machismo.

Read the anecdote

Una vez en Quito tomamos un taxi para ir a una cita. Estábamos con Blanquita, Rosita y otra compañera que no recuerdo su nombre. El chofer era un poco maduro y empezó a charlar. Nos preguntó de dónde veníamos y Rosita le contó que éramos de otros países y todo eso, ¿no? Entonces el señor se burló de nosotras y nos preguntó si éramos casadas. Rosita le dijo que sí, que teníamos varios hijos y que habíamos

venido a esta conferencia sobre la «Participación de la mujer en la lucha por la democracia».

Entonces el señor nos preguntó:--¿Y quién está cuidando a sus hijos mientras ustedes están en estas actividades? Y peor todavía si vienen de tan lejos-- y que tenía mucha compasión de nuestros maridos porque se habían quedado cuidando a nuestros hijos.

Entonces la Rosita le dijo; --Si aquí hay una democracia, ¿qué clase de demócrata es usted? Usted debe de ser uno de esos señores que no permiten que su mujer participe.

--Las mujeres tienen que quedarse en su casa --dijo él.

--Entonces usted, en vez de mujer tiene una esclava -dijo ella.

--¡No!De ninguna manera --dijo él. Yo a mi esposa la quiero, la estimo y no quisiera que se muera, porque ella cuida a mis hijos, trabaja bastante. Ella hace de todo. Yo reconozco y le doy su lugar.

--¿Y el derecho a organizarse y a participar? --le preguntó ella.

--No --dice él. Ella tiene quehacer en la casa.

--¿Pero por qué usted no podría quedarse un día en su casa mientras ella va a organizarse?

Entonces él dijo que viene muy cansado y que es imposible que se haga cargo de los hijos .

--¡Ah, sí! ---le dijo la Rosita. ¡Eso sí que no le creo, señor! Porque usted acaba de decirme que tiene muchos hijos y que vienen de trabajo muy cansado. ¿Y cómo hizo los hijos si usted estaba tan cansado?

El pobre señor se puso muy colorado y no sabía qué decir.

Answer the following questions:

1. Can you use your description of machismo to refer to any of the characters in the anecdote?
2. What is the role of women in this society from the perspective of the taxi driver? the women?
3. How is machismo being challenged? why?

Restate the main objective

Culture is fluid and in a process of change. It is always being questioned.

We can move on to the fourth goal. To make students aware that Hispanic culture is made up of a variety of other cultures among them European, African and Amerindian. The Latin American essay is a rich source of materials. Let us not forget that one of the themes in the continent has been to find the uniqueness of the culture in the mixture of these different components. "Nuestra América" by José Martí or "Calibán" by Roberto Fernández Retamar are good examples of essays that can be used for this purpose. They present Latin America as a distinct version of Western civilization characterized by the profound influence of non-european civilizations.

The coexistence and influence of one culture on another is not only a characteristic of Latin American culture but it is to be found in all cultures. As an illustration of this theme I have used Peter Burger's "A Tale of Two Moralities." In this fictional story, Manuela, a young Mexican woman working in California is faced with a moral dilemma caused by the clashes of values between a technologically advanced and a rural traditional society. After working for a year and saving money, Manuela plans to return to Mexico. She now faces the difficult choice of moving back to her village and

its collective solidarity or leaving it behind to seek economic and social advancement in Mexico City.

It is now, I believe, that the student will be able to tackle the cultural information once he/she had time to think about himself/herself as a cultural being, has understood culture as something dynamic and changing, has understood the plurality of culture and finally has become aware of the influencing effects that one culture has on another. The main goal is after all for the student to be able to evaluate the worth, reliability or importance of different types of information.

Now we can return to the question raised at the beginning of this paper and say that yes there is room for Octavio Paz. Latin American novelists, poets, essayists and intellectuals in general have always been concerned with defining, representing, criticizing and reshaping culture, and their work is the best raw material that we have in order to teach about it. Their work represents the complexity of the topic. It is a disservice to students to try to reduce an intricate and difficult topic to simple, many times, meaningless formulas.

The following table, for example, is useful, as a shorthand to someone that is familiar with the culture but useless to someone who does not know it intimately.

Table 7-1. Latin American Culture and Affected Business Functions.

Aspects of Latin American Culture	Examples of Business Functions Affected
Decisions are expressions of wisdom by the person in authority, and any questioning would imply lack of confidence in his judgment.	Decision-making process

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R.W. Brislin's categories of prejudice, taken from Research Within Reach. Research-guided Responses to the Concerns of Foreign Language Teachers

(1) Redneck racism. An extreme form of prejudice found all over the world in which some people believe that members of a certain cultural group are inherently inferior and thus do not merit just and courteous treatment. It is important to point out that this type of prejudice does occur worldwide; sometimes our students receive the impression that only Americans are prejudiced. And it is encouraging to note that formal education plays a powerful role in reducing this kind of racism. Research shows that, as the number of years of formal education increases, the incidence of redneck racism decreases.

(2) Symbolic racism.. This is an elusive form of prejudice and is probably more widespread than redneck racism among affluent members of the middle class in various countries. People with this prejudice have negative feelings about members of another group because they feel that the group is disturbing the status quo. A typical expression of this view would be a statement such as, "Freshmen/Women/Native Americans are getting too demanding in their push for equal rights." Those who exhibit symbolic racism do not dislike members of the group *per se*, and they do not hold the violent views characteristic of redneck racism. In fact, they would stoutly deny that they are prejudiced, a situation which makes it difficult to help them overcome the problem.

(3) Tokenism. People in this group are also unaware of their own negative feelings toward others -- at least at a conscious level. Often they engage in some token activity to demonstrate goodwill toward members of an out-group. This "proves" (to themselves and to observers) that they are open-minded. It also excuses them from becoming engaged in more self-involving ways in the fight against prejudice. (If you mail a contribution to the United Negro College Fund, you don't need to appear in person at a school board hearing to advocate the observance of Black Awareness Week.)

(4) Arms-length- prejudice. People with this kind of prejudice display positive reactions toward members of another group while informal or semiformal situations (conducting business, dining at a banquet, serving on a committee); but they hold themselves aloof in more intimate situations (relating as neighbors, dining in someone's home, dating). Because these people give every appearance of cordiality at the surface level, arms-length prejudice is often difficult to spot.

(5) Real likes and dislikes. Sometimes members of a given group engage in behaviors (littering, smoking, noise-making) that engender negative feelings in others. Most discussions

of prejudice fail to recognize this common form of hostility; yet individuals are entitled to genuine likes and dislikes and should not be made to feel that every negative view represents a hidden character flaw.

(6) The familiar and unfamiliar. Research has shown that people are drawn to those who share the same behavior patterns, the same values, the same world view. On the other hand, they are less comfortable interacting with those whose attitudes and actions are unlike their own. Thus people's natural preference for what is comfortable and non-stressful may result in behavior which others might label "avoidance" or "discrimination." Students should be aware of this kind of mild prejudice based on what is familiar and unfamiliar.